Indian workers in Gulf countries

2170. SHRI NANDI YELLAIAH: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of number of workers migrated to various Gulf countries from India, Gulf country-wise, whose passports were taken away by their employees and exploited as worst than slaves and are not allowed to come back to India and a large number of whom are in jails for various offences related to migration, who had been cheated by the agents of such employers, who are freely functioning in India;

(b) the details of the action taken by Government so far, to relieve such migrated workers and the details of cases booked so far against such unscrupulous agents functioning in India; and

(c) if not, the detailed reasons for not taking any action?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (c) As per information received from the Indian Missions in Gulf countries, the sponsors normally retain the passports of the employees when they reach the destination country in order to obtain work permit /extension or renewal of visas and for security reasons as well as to discourage lateral movement of the emigrant workers to other employers. Such passports are returned to the employees by the sponsor in case of need, such as foreign travel or return to India. In case of any inconvenience reported, the concerned Mission immediately takes up the case with the sponsor directly and with the local authorities through local foreign office.

Security and assistance to Indians working abroad

†2171. SHRI PYARELAL KHANDELWAL: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the role of Government's newly constituted Ministry for the security and assistance of Indian workers working abroad;

(b) whether Government have details of Indian workers working abroad, their workplaces and conditions like compliance of labour laws etc.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether it is also a fact that the functions of his Ministry is confined to organising overseas conferences only;

(e) if not, the details thereof alongwith the details of achievements; and

(f) the measures Government are going to take for the safety of overseas Indian workers after the Bahrain fire accident?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) The role of Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is to implement the Emigration Act, 1983 for the protection and welfare of Indians working abroad.

(b) and (c) The Indian workers in the Gulf are estimated to be about 4-5 million. The terms and conditions of their employment are governed by employment contracts.

(d) and (e) No, Sir. The Ministry serves as a nodal point for all matters relating to overseas Indians. The Ministry has launched Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana, 2006 with effect from 1.2.2006. The Ministry has taken several other initiatives for protection and welfare of Indian workers abroad including proposing amendments to the Emigration Act, introducing e-governance in emigration, processsing bilateral agreements with labour receiving countries, liberalising emigration norms, pursuing upgradation and modernisation of the offices of the Protectors of Emigrants.

(f) The Indian Embassy in Bahrain reported that on 30.07.2006, a major fire broke out in a two-storey building in Gudabiya, Bahrain, which housed about 220 Indian labourers. Sixteen Indian nationals, all from Tamil Nadu, died in this fire accident. Eleven Indian nationals were injured in the fire and were treated in Salmania Hospital and discharged the same day. One hundred and ninety-six Indian workers have since been shifted to another accommodation. The Government of Bahrain has ordered an enquiry into the causes that led to this fire accident and to verify whether the lodging provided to the Indian workers was in conformity with housing safety and health criteria. The Ministry has alread written to the Government of Bahrain at the Minister's level urging grant of *ex gratia* payments to the families of these workers who perished in the fire and to those injured.

For the protection and welfare of emigrant wokers, the Government has introduced the Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana, 2006 w.e.f. 01.02.2006, a compulsory insurance scheme. Officers of the Indian Missions also visit labour camps from time to time to see that the living conditions are in conformity with the local labour laws. Efforts are also being made to enter into bi-lateral labour agreements with the countries in the Gulf region.

Implementation of Constitutional 73rd Amendment

2172. SHRI S.P.M. SYED KHAN: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether any remarkable achievement has been attained with regard to implementation of the Constitutional 73rd Amendment of 1992 by his Ministry since its creation;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the kind of steps that are being taken by his Ministry with regard to planning and implementation of programme of economic development and social justice through Panchayati Raj Institutions?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) Ministry of Panchayati Raj has taken several initiatives ever since its inception in May, 2004 to implement Part IX of the Constitution in order that Panchayats emerge as self governing institutions. The mandatory provisions of Part IX regarding Panchayats relate to constitution, composition, elections and reservations. The rest of the provisions are enabling provisions and involve the discretion of the State Governments. Hence, the first achievement of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been to build a consensus around a set of 150 points of action during Seven Round Table Meetings of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj held between July and December, 2004. These points comprise time bound action plan for achieving full devolution of functions, funds and functionaries to Panchayati Raj Institution in accordance with the letter and spirit of Constitution. The implementation of this time-bound action plan calls for close co-ordination between the Government of India the States and the Union Territories as also between the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministries of the Government of India dealing